



Consumer perceptions of Woolworths food waste management: An exploratory study.

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Abstract

Food waste has a negative impact on the environment, society and economies. In South Africa, where millions of people are food insecure and an estimated one third of food is wasted at a cost of R61 billion per annum, reducing household food waste could aid sustainability and combat hunger (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2017). Consumers also have increasing expectations for brands to act responsibly and demonstrate a meaningful purpose beyond profit (Beverland, 2021). To minimise consumer food waste and maintain positive brand perceptions, it is important for brands to understand how consumers interpret retail food waste management practices like date labels and promotions (Phillips & Shah, 2017). This exploratory study reports on the results of in-depth interviews conducted with eight Woolworths customers in Johannesburg, South Africa. The study was conducted from an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative data was analysed through a thematic analysis. The study found differing consumer interpretations of date labels were especially notable between males and females and perceptions that food expires close to the use-by date result in food waste. Portion size inaccuracies and sales promotions that encourage excessive purchase, led to overbuying behaviour and food waste. Participants reported that Woolworths's superior quality food in terms of taste, freshness and shelf-life contributed to household food waste reduction. The donation of food which has passed the sell-by date was the most recognised and appreciated Woolworths's food waste management practice among consumers. The study concluded that Woolworths's consumer facing practices demonstrated meaningful brand attributes in the context of food waste management and increased positive perceptions of the brand among consumers. These practices also aligned with favourable operations of the waste hierarchy framework. However, additional knowledge of food waste at other points in the supply chain and brand perceptions from a broader sample needs to be established to gain a deeper understanding of meaningful brands in a food waste context. Strategies like dated labels, promotions and serving recommendations also need to be reevaluated and studied further in culture-specific contexts to optimise consumer understanding and avoid misinterpretation.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the **Postgraduate Diploma in Brand Building (PDB1)** to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

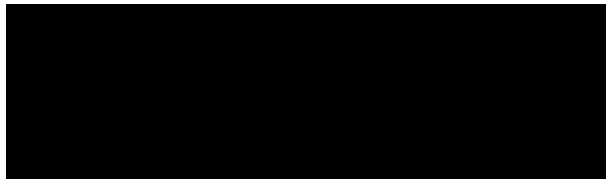


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Introduction

Background and Context

Food waste has become a pressing global sustainability issue that harms the environment, society and economies, while posing a severe risk to food security (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), 2020). Worldwide estimates suggest that, 1.25 billion people do not have consistent access to enough or nutritious food and 746 million people are experiencing hunger or severe food insecurity (FAO, 2020). Despite the increasing prevalence of global hunger, one third of the world's food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted each year (World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 2017). Subsequently, resources used in the production process are also wasted, including land, water, energy and fertilisers, which creates a significant financial burden for many countries (Tonini, Albizzati & Astrup, 2018).

Internationally, an increasing number of studies identify household or consumer level food waste as a major contributor to the problem in developing countries (Kameke & Fischer, 2018; Cronje, Van de Merwe & Muller, 2018; Roe, Bender & Qi, 2020). Primary reasons include excess purchase or preparation of food but also consumer expectations which can influence demand (Ramukhwatho, du Plessis, & Oelofse, 2016; Horoś & Ruppenthal, 2021). However, consumer perceptions that lead to food waste behaviours can also be affected by retail practices, like promotions or labelling that may alter how much food they purchase or how long they store food (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016; Phillips & Shah, 2017).

In South Africa, 32.7% of food produced for human consumption is wasted each year, equal to 210 kilograms per person (WWF, 2017). Resource waste is also substantial, with 20% of the country's water being used to produce food that ends up wasted, costing in excess of R61 billion (Nahman & de Lange, 2013). There is also a negative environmental impact with the generation of 2.8-4.14 tonnes of harmful greenhouse gases per tonne of food waste (WWF, 2017).

Rationale

The United Nations (2021), argued the importance of food waste management, setting targets of halving waste at retail and consumer levels by 2030. Reducing food waste can reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions by preventing organic waste build-up in landfills (Oelofse, Musewema & Ramukhwatho, 2018). Effective food waste management is also essential to ensuring sustainable food production that can support growing populations and food security (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, valuable limited resources like water and agricultural land are preserved and reuse or recycling operations can be repurposed in animal feed or energy generation (Tonini *et al.*, 2018).

How consumers perceive brand success has also been increasingly associated with brands, which have an identifiable purpose that benefits people or the environment (Beverland, 2021). As modern consumers are becoming more conscious of sustainability, they actively support brands that reflect their values, making the adoption of responsible business strategies necessary to remain relevant (Besley & Ghatak, 2017). Brands with purpose that do not harm but rather improve environmental, social or economic conditions by tackling issues like food waste are regarded as healthier and of higher value with greater customer loyalty and growth potential (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

While research exists on consumer expectations and positive consumer attitudes toward sustainable brands, there is a lack of research in the context of food waste management (Sharma & Joshi, 2019). Additionally, there is a gap in research regarding how consumers perceive retail food waste management practices in South Africa and what these interpretations could mean for consumer food waste habits. As previous studies indicate that brands can alter consumer perceptions of sustainability issues, it is important that brands understand how their food waste management practices are being perceived and understood (Le Borgne, Sirieix & Costa, 2018). Retailers like Woolworths' efforts to reduce food waste, such as sell by dates, packaging, serving sizes or promotions (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2020), may not be interpreted in the intended way by consumers and in worst case, may increase food waste (Roodhuyzen, Luning, Fogliano & Steenbekkers, 2017).

Further gaps in research exist due to Covid-19 which has changed consumer behaviour and food wastage, potentially reducing relevance of prior research (Pappalardo, Cerroni, Nayga, & Yang, 2020). Consumer perceptions may have also changed in unknown ways due to shifting personal contexts, necessitating new study in this area (Roe *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions is necessary to inform food waste management strategies that consumers engage with, especially in the context of Covid-19 (Roe *et al.*, 2020).

For brand managers, this research could assist in understanding how consumers interpret strategies like dated labels, sales promotions, packaging, portion recommendations and other initiatives to help brands avoid negative interpretations that may lead to increased consumer food waste (Waste Resource and Action Programme (Wrap), 2011; Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018). This research could also aid brands in optimising food waste management efforts at the retail and consumer levels and brand reputation through customer perceptions of the brand as a brand with purpose beyond profit (Beverland, 2021).

Research Problem

With almost 35% of the population living without food security, food waste severely threatens sustainability in South Africa's food supply systems (WWF, 2017). It is well documented that retailers can alter consumer perceptions through their marketing efforts, encouraging excessive purchase or preparation of food through their promotions (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018). The food waste management practices of retailers such as packaging, recommended portion sizes and date labels may also alter consumer food waste levels (Roodhuyzen *et al.*, 2017). Thus, misunderstanding how consumers perceive certain practices may potentially increase or decrease consumer food waste and threaten brand reputation (Phillips & Shah, 2017).

According to Filimonau and Gherbin (2017), while retail brands invest significantly into food waste management, brand managers may have a limited understanding of consumer interpretations of their practices. As there is very little research on consumer perceptions in South Africa, this presents a gap in research. Therefore, an exploratory, qualitative study which investigates how consumers perceive retail food waste management practices in South Africa, specifically in the context of how it affects consumer level waste and brand perception, could aid brands in gaining an understanding toward reducing food waste during and after Covid-19. Furthermore, as consumer perceptions are shaped by personal context, including culture and experiences (Packard, 2017), the research leans to interpretivist thinking and understanding the constructed realities and interpretations of consumers in reference to Woolworths' food waste management practices that they encounter (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Studying how consumers with different personal realities perceive practices with reference to purposeful brands could contribute to expanding food waste literature. This could be useful in understanding how consumers view brands with purpose as not harming sustainability in a food waste context and in optimising brand strategies for consumer waste reduction (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017).

Research Goal and Questions

Aim of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative, exploratory study, is to investigate the perceptions of Woolworths' consumers in Johannesburg, South Africa toward Woolworths' food waste management practices in relation to Woolworths being seen as a brand with purpose.

According to (Grubor & Milovanov, 2017), a brand with purpose does not engage, or limits their engagement in practices which harm sustainability in terms of the environment, society or economies. Consumers also generally have higher expectations and regard for brands that are perceived as sustainable (Beverland, 2021). However, in the context of food waste management, strategies employed by retailers which are aimed at reducing consumer level food waste have the potential to increase waste depending on consumer interpretation, specifically in terms of date labels, promotions and serving recommendations (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Wrap, 2011). As it is largely unknown how Woolworths' consumers perceive and interpret waste management practices implemented by Woolworths in a Covid-19 context, the identification of these perceptions is a primary aim of the study. The study also aims to understand consumer perceptions in relation to Woolworths as a brand with purpose based on their food waste management, to ascertain how they contribute or do not contribute to the brand purpose and sustainability.

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of Woolworths' consumers from the Northcliff, Hydepark, Randpark ridge and Honeydew areas at locations chosen by participants. The delimitations of the study include contextual, sample and geographic boundaries to ensure the research can be practically achieved (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

The study does not aim to understand consumer food waste management behaviours or purchase behaviour and is limited to consumer understanding of Woolworths food waste management practices and if these practices contribute to their perception of the brand as a brand with purpose. Furthermore, the food

waste management practices considered for the purpose of this study are limited to those that are designed to reduce consumer level food waste and are known to consumers. Food waste management practices that occur internally in the organisation such as contributions to research or at points in the supply chain outside of consumer knowledge will not be considered.

The study will also be limited to consumers of South African Woolworths' retail outlets in the Johannesburg area, so data can be reasonably obtained within the time-frame of the research (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). International Woolworths retail store consumers will be excluded from the study for practical limitation and as results cannot be generalised because food waste management practices and consumer profiles may differ (Silverman, 2010). Only individual Woolworths' consumers who purchase from Woolworths' retail stores will be selected as participants. Other retailers and third-party recipients of Woolworths products, such as donations will be excluded because they may have business relationships and biases that do not apply to general consumers.

Research Questions

Primary Research Objective

The primary research objective is to gain a thorough understanding of the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a “meaningful” brand in context of food waste management.

Secondary Research Questions

1. What are the food waste management practices directed toward consumers in Woolworths?
2. How do Woolworths’ consumers interpret meaning in retail level food waste management practices?
3. What does Woolworths do to be seen as a brand with purpose in terms of food waste management?
4. What are Woolworths’ consumer attitudes towards the brand based on their food waste management strategies?

Literature Review

Existing literature was reviewed to gain a holistic preliminary understanding of food waste and position the study in the existing body of knowledge (Howard, 2014). The internationally accepted waste hierarchy was established as a theoretical framework (Papargyropoulou, Lozano, Steinberger, Wright & Ujang, 2014). Recent literature on the background of food waste across the supply chain; waste management in the retail sector including Woolworth's practices and South African consumers attitudes toward food waste were also reviewed. Finally, purposeful brands and emerging literature in a Covid-19 context are considered (Roe *et al.*, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The waste hierarchy theory developed by Ad Lasink, is regularly applied to food waste management (Teigiserova, Hamelin & Thomsen, 2019). As a guideline tool for waste reduction, it aims to reduce the negative effects of waste on the environment, economy and human wellbeing (Pires & Martinho, 2019). The waste hierarchy identifies and prioritises waste management operations based on what practices provide the most favourable social and environmental outcome (Van Ewijk & Stegeman, 2016). Operations include: Prevention of surplus food generation in production and consumption; Re-use surplus food for human consumption through distribution to people in need; Recycle food waste as animal feed or through composting; Recovery of energy and management of unavoidable food waste and, disposal, as a last resort which routes food waste to landfills (Papargyropoulou *et al.*, 2014).

This study will apply the waste hierarchy framework in a food waste context, exploring if and how Woolworths's consumer food waste management practices fall into the identified tiers (Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017). This is to understand the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a brand with purpose, considering that a purposeful brand would utilise sustainable operations like prevention, re-use and recycling to manage food waste (Eriksson & Spanberg, 2017; Beverland,

2021). Additionally, consumer perceptions and interpretation of Woolworths's practices will be considered in relation to the waste hierarchy to understand if and why it contributes to the brand being perceived as having purpose beyond profit (Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018; Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). This will also provide insight into whether Woolworths' practices enable consumers to manage their food waste more sustainably based on the waste hierarchy (Kameke & Fischer, 2018).

The waste hierarchy was chosen for this study based on extensive use in many other food waste studies (Teigiserova *et al.*, 2019; Papargyropoulou *et al.*, 2014; Ali, 2020; Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017; Giordano, Falasconi, Cicatiello & Pancino, 2020; Eriksson & Spanberg, 2017).

Woolworths Food Waste Management

Filimonau and Gherbin (2017), suggest that it is difficult to attain accurate data in the retail sector due to confidentiality issues and a lack of transparency in corporate practices. Woolworths Holdings Limited (2020), assert they are more transparent in their food waste management through their Good Business Journey report which provides a detailed overview of their sustainability strategy and progress to date. Woolworths is strongly associated with quality and sustainability (Luiz, Bowen & Beswick, 2011), which also forms part of their purpose and values and their vision is to be a highly responsible retailer (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2021a). Woolworths Holdings Limited (2021b), suggests reducing food waste is a key focus and they have adopted the waste hierarchy in their commitment to avoiding food ending up in landfill.

Food waste management in the retail sector can include responsible sourcing from producers with sustainable farming and processing methods (Kliaugaitė & Kruopienė, 2018) Woolworths implements this through their Farming for the future initiative that sources from local suppliers and regulates production, reducing waste at the harvest stages (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2021b). Surplus food can also be redistributed in line with the second operation of the waste hierarchy (Teller, Holweg & Kotzab, 2017). According to Woolworths

Holdings Limited (2020), they donate leftover food (within its sell-by date) to over 1500 charity partners on a weekly basis.

Woolworths Holdings Limited (2021:2) states, "We recognise that much of the waste we generate as a business does not happen in our own operations, but rather in our customers' homes and in the supply chain." Subsequently, the company has contributed to research in partnership with the WWF to understand product lifecycles and facilitates education programs at schools. Woolworths Holdings Limited (2020), argues that fit-for-purpose packaging that extends shelf-life and labelling of products with serving size, storage, preparation and sell by date recommendations is another way in which they combat food waste.

Purposeful Brands

Literature suggests that brands need to act purposefully beyond a desire for profit by ensuring their business practices do not harm people and the environment, not only for the benefit of societies but also for the health of the brand itself (Cook, Erwin, Carmody and Enslin, 2010; Havas, 2021; Beverland, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Besley & Ghatak, 2017). Younger consumers have shown buying preference for brands that demonstrate social or environmental responsibility and active disdain for brands that do not (Besley & Ghatak, 2017); necessitating that brands shift towards purposeful strategies that create shared value by tackling societal and environmental issues to remain relevant (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Brands with purpose exhibit greater customer preference and loyalty, stronger brand equity, resilience against external threats and improved employee productivity, retention and advocacy (Havas, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011). Thus, to ensure continued success, it is important for brands to understand how and why addressing key social issues like food waste can contribute to customers perceiving them as purposeful while avoiding management practices that may increase food waste (Beverland, 2021; Besley & Ghatak, 2017).

Background of Food Waste and Management

Food waste has been identified as a global problem, negatively affecting, environmental protection, economic viability and social equity (FAO, 2020). Despite 26% of households experiencing hunger, roughly 1/3 of food in South Africa is not consumed but rather sent to landfill (WWF, 2017). Thus, in terms of the waste hierarchy, South Africa is utilising the least favourable operation of disposal for up to 90% of its waste (WWF, 2017). Disposal entailing landfill or incineration which can cause environmental damage and severe health issues (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018). Thus, authors suggest that urgent corporate and individual action to adopt food waste management is necessary to ensure food security and sustainability (Teigiserova *et al.*, 2019; Garcia-Garcia, Woolley, Rahimifard & Colwill, 2016; Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017).

Food waste refers to food produced for human consumption that is thrown away, but which was still nutritious and safe to eat and mostly occurs in households, food service or in retail (FAO, 2020; Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017). Distribution and retail account for 20% of food waste in South Africa and 5% at the consumer level (Nahman & de Lange, 2013). Consumer level food waste depends on behaviour & perceptions, including over purchasing, lack of planning, poor cooking skills, excessive preparation and inappropriate storage (FAO, 2020; Oelofse *et al.*, 2016).

Retail Sector

To reduce negative impacts, brands invest in consumer level food waste management, often as part of corporate social responsibility programmes (Global Food Security, 2013). However, research suggests that strategies aimed at consumers have the potential to be misunderstood and increase food waste, i.e., bulk promotions that encourage excess purchase (Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018) or misinterpreted date labels that cause edible food to be thrown away too early (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Phillips & Shah, 2017). Teller, Holweg, Reiner & Kotzab (2018) argue that many retailers prioritise operational efficiency and profit over environmental responsibility, suggesting inflexibility in changes to promotions or

packaging. Purposeful brand studies disagree, citing brands are willing to change to avoid negative consumer perceptions (Besley & Ghatak, 2017; Havas, 2021). Thus, for food waste management to be effective, attributing factors and consumer perceived brand purpose need to be fully understood and strategies integrated into the retail sector (Kliaugaitė & Kruopienė, 2018; Phillips & Shah, 2017).

Emerging literature suggests the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions altered food waste management practices and consumer behaviour, introducing new issues like stockpiling (Pappalardo *et al.*, 2020). Panic buying due to a fear of food insecurity led consumers to purchase more non-perishable goods which reduced household food waste (Pappalardo *et al.*, 2020). However, with a general lack of data there are conflicting ideas that consumers are still over-buying due to residual fears and in the long-term food will be forgotten in storage and household waste will increase (Roe *et al.*, 2020).

South African Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Waste

Fruits and vegetables account for 44% of wasted food in South Africa (WWF, 2017). Hermsdorf, Rombach and Bitsch (2017) argue that lowering quality standards for produce in retail can reduce food waste; congruent with findings by (Oelofse, Nahman, Baig, Salemdeeb, Nizami & Reynolds, 2020) that standards for produce are primarily based on visual appearance and consumers expect near perfection at full prices; perceptions that need to change to reduce waste.

Purchasing excess is another cause of household food waste, exacerbated by promotions that encourage consumers to purchase more than necessary to take advantage of a discount (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018). A French study with similar findings also found consumer attitudes were more positive towards promotions with a lower perceived probability of waste (Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018). Higher income consumers waste more food due to excess purchase and preparation which can be attributed to a desire to have more than not enough when entertaining or feeding family (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018). Low-income consumers mostly waste due to special offers or poor storage (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016). People may also

misunderstand serving sizes or there is too much variance between Woolworths' concept of a single serving and people's desired image of a single serving (Roodhuyzen, Luning, Fogliano & Steenbekkers, 2017).

A study in Kimberly revealed that 43% of participants were greatly bothered when they had to throw food away, 18% moderately, 27% slightly and only 12% were not concerned (Cronje *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, Cronje *et al.*, (2018) argue that the majority do not meal plan and 61% discarded food when excess was prepared. There is also literature that outlines consumer interest in sustainable practices and expectations for brands to be socially responsible, but this does not necessarily correlate with a change in consumer behaviour (Cronje *et al.*, 2018; Sharma & Joshi, 2019).

Conclusion

The waste hierarchy framework presents a guide for sustainable food waste management that does not harm the environment while being socio-economically beneficial (Teigiserova *et al.*, 2019). Woolworths already adopts and implements practices based on the framework, suggesting the brand may act purposefully (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2020). However, consumer perceptions in this context which can affect brand preference, loyalty and equity have not been studied or understood (Porter & Kramer, 2011). With consumer food waste identified as a severe problem in South Africa and retail practices having the potential to increase waste based on consumer interpretation, understanding consumer perceptions is essential to food waste reduction and strategy optimisation (WWF, 2017). Furthermore, as brand success is increasingly associated with purposeful brands that focus on sustainability, understanding if food waste management contributes to brands being perceived as purposeful can inform strategies and spur action toward resolving food waste (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Beverland, 2021).

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a way of thinking which reflects a researcher's view of the world and the nature of reality (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). A paradigm informs how research should be approached, how data should be understood and how problems should be addressed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). For this study, the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach was selected as the foundation for the research methodology.

Interpretivism is related to the hermeneutic-phenomenological sciences, in that it is practical and aims to gain in-depth understanding of social phenomena (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a; O'Donoghue, 2006). Interpretivists believe that, unlike physical objects in the natural world, human experience is constantly influenced by their environment and therefore, subjective and actively interpreted (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a; Hammersley, 2013).

Interpretivism therefore assumes a relativist ontology with the constructivist belief that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed in the mind and experienced subjectively based on individuals' culture, experiences and interpretation. (Blaikie & Priest, 2017; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). These realities should be understood by studying events, artefacts and the meaning people ascribe to social actions from the perspective of different people (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). The aim being to understand, empathetically, human behaviour and perceived meanings (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006).

The epistemological position of interpretivism is knowledge is not completely objective but rather subjective and dependant on social meaning systems; hence, reality can be interpreted in a multitude of diverse ways and what is considered factual is not universal (Grix, 2018; Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). Thus, results cannot be generalised because participants and the researcher will inevitably let their personal experience, culture, beliefs and expectations affect the research process (Punch, 2013; Grix, 2018).

The metatheoretical position of interpretivism is that the theory should 'tell a story' through detailed description and interpretation of people's lived experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a:30). Thick descriptions and the narratives of participants including direct quotes, assist the reader in better understanding the social reality, values and ascribed meaning behind actions from the perspective of the individual being studied (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a; Grix, 2018). The research is also usually inductive and seeks to reveal important information from the narratives of participants, instead of entering the process with preconceived ideas to be tested (Grix, 2018).

In the methodological position of interpretivism, qualitative research is used to collect data from participants, usually over long periods of time to interpret the meanings and context of participants in their daily life (Patton, 2002). Qualitative data is non-numerical and primarily verbal with emphasis on words and conversation which is usually recorded for the purpose of analysis (Silverman, 2005). Qualitative data collection methods can include in-depth open-ended interviews, ethnography, narrative inquiry, researcher notes and observations, focus groups and discourses among others (Miller & Glassner, 2020).

Interpretivism adopts a balanced axiology where research is carried out empathetically and is value laden with the researcher acting as the research instrument (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). The axiological position is based on the assumption that the researcher's values and personal interpretations will be reflected in the data analysis and outcome along with that of participants (Killam, 2013).

Interpretivism was chosen for this study because it is congruent with the researchers' beliefs and best suited to the social topic of study, which can ensure a strong research design (Mills *et al.*, 2006). Qualitative research could provide a unique understanding of how consumers perceive brands in the context of their food waste management (Naidu, 2020; Beverland, 2021). Food waste is also an inherently human and social problem related to consumption habits, demand and consumer perception (Kymäläinen, Seisto & Malila, 2021). Thus, empirical data cannot tell us why consumers perceive brands as having purpose or how consumers interpret food waste management, whereas interpretivist ontology and

qualitative data can uncover subtleties and provide insight into consumer perceptions toward answering these questions (Silverman, 2020; Beverland, 2021). Furthermore, qualitative methodology is flexible, adaptable to new information and findings are somewhat transferable which is suitable for shifting Covid-19 conditions (Anderson, 2010; Roberts, Pavlakis & Richards, 2021). Considering that interpretivism is effective for the understanding of social processes and the how and why of human behaviour, it was well suited to this study (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a).

Research Design

To gain an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions of food waste management practices in relation to Woolworths being described as a brand with purpose, a qualitative phenomenological research design was chosen. As consumer perceptions were being studied, phenomenology, which focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences through ascribed meaning was most suitable to the research objective (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). Participants lived experiences are described and interpreted subjectively to gain insight into a phenomenon (Grix, 2018), which is effective when studying and interpreting meaning in human actions or thought (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a).

A phenomenological approach also aided in identifying commonalities in how the sample experienced food waste management practices, which helps in understanding potential drivers of consumer level food waste (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, consumers favour brands with value systems that reflect their own (Beverland, 2021). As value and belief systems can be complex and meaning subjectively constructed by individuals, it cannot be quantified, necessitating a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand how consumers assign meaning to brand practices and perceive brand purpose in the context of food waste (Moustakas, 1994; Grubor & Milovanov, 2017). Thus, phenomenology is useful in inquiry into challenging social problems and to gain insights about phenomena through describing the experiences of others in order to learn from those experiences (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). For these reasons, a phenomenological research design supported the purpose of this study and could inform brand food waste management strategies.

Research Method

A research method determines how data will be collected, analysed and interpreted (Davis, 2014a). Considering that it was unknown how consumers perceived Woolworths's food waste management practices and the brand purpose in this context, the study adopted an exploratory approach to investigate and understand the unclear problem (Grix, 2018). A qualitative method was best employed with exploratory research because it can be used to gain deep insights into social phenomena where insufficient knowledge exists (Silverman, 2010). As the primary objective was to understand whether Woolworths can be described as meaningful in the context of food waste, a qualitative approach was necessary to describe and interpret people's perceptions of Woolworths' food waste management, gain understanding and identify themes in participant's experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). Furthermore, consumer perceptions are subjective and based on their personal interpretation and cultural or other contexts (Kameke & Fischer, 2018). Thus, understanding consumer perceptions required the comprehensive study of their individual realities, attitudes and interpretations of food waste management practices and this aligned with the qualitative interpretivist methodology chosen for this study (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a; Grix, 2018).

Consumer perceptions and reasoning are also difficult to quantify numerically (McDonald & Oates, 2006), thus, a qualitative research method, in which non-numerical data is collected and critically analysed was best suited to understand the consumer interpretations of food waste management practices that may lead to food waste behaviour (Hammersley, 2013; Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017). Flexibility to adapt to emerging ideas and generation of detailed descriptions of people's experiences could also aid in informing solutions or improvements to food waste management systems and brand purpose (Maxwell, 2012; Filimonau & Gherbin, 2017).

Population

The population is the entire set of entities to be studied as part of the research; it is the broader group from which information is needed, that conclusions will be drawn about and which have specific shared characteristics and relevance to the research topic (Pascoe, 2014). For this study, the population chosen was Woolworths' consumers in Johannesburg, South Africa. This population was selected because the aim of the study was to understand consumer perceptions of Woolworths food waste management and if the brand could be described as purposeful in this context. To this end, customers who purchase food at least once a month at Woolworths were best positioned to participate and provide information as they have experienced the phenomenon and have some knowledge of the topic (Pascoe, 2014). Due to time and financial constraints, the accessible population who could reasonably be accessed by the researcher was identified as Woolworths consumers from Northcliff, HydePark, Randpark Ridge and Honeydew areas in Johannesburg (Pascoe, 2014).

Sample

The research sample refers to a smaller subset of the population who will actually participate in the study and who will represent the larger population when data is analysed and conclusions are drawn (Pascoe, 2014). A sample of eight Woolworths consumers was selected through non-probability purposive sampling to participate in the study.

Non-probability sampling involved drawing the sample based on the judgement of the researcher and non-random criteria, meaning all members of the population did not have a chance of being selected as part of the sample (Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz, 2016). Non-probability sampling is mostly used in qualitative studies and necessary because the entire population of Woolworths food consumers could not be reasonably determined and accessed (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Purposive sampling was used because it is time and cost-effective, involving selection of participants based on relevant characteristics that were most likely to be informative toward fulfilling the aims of the research (Etikan & Bala, 2017). As the study was qualitative, the sample size was limited to eight elements of

voluntary participants and purposefully selected based on typical cases of consumers who shop at Woolworths for food products at least once per month to improve relevance (Suri, 2011). The sample was inclusive of male and female Woolworths' consumers, age 18 years and over from various age groups. The sample was contacted telephonically.

The sampling plan was suitable to this qualitative research as the results would not be generalised to the whole population and the sample size was sufficient to reach an acceptable level of data saturation on consumer facing food waste management practices (Pascoe, 2014).

Data Collection

This research required direct interaction with Woolworths' consumers to ascertain their perceptions of food waste management practices. Therefore, qualitative primary data collection methods that work with the interpretivist paradigm and phenomenological research design were undertaken in the form of in-depth structured interviews (Davis, 2014b; du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). In-depth interviews were chosen because the data collection method enables a researcher to learn about participant beliefs, perceptions and opinions in detail through posing open-ended questions (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Additionally, non-verbal reactions and open-ended responses provided insights which cannot be achieved through closed-ended surveys or secondary research alone (Punch, 2013).

In-depth structured interviews were suitable because of their effectiveness in generating rich data which could be analysed extensively to interpret and understand how consumers perceived food waste management practices and brand purpose (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Hence, the data collection method was congruent with the interpretivist paradigm which seeks to describe and interpret the lived experience of participants (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014a). Structured interviews are also context sensitive and flexible, enabling the researcher to ask additional probing questions if needed to clarify responses, which was useful in the case of food waste where all participants did not have

extensive knowledge on the topic in relation to Woolworths's practices (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

Standardised open-ended interview questions were used to ask all participants the same questions in a set order; this was to simplify response comparisons and data analysis, improving cost-effectiveness, data organisation and making it easier to identify and interpret themes (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Participants were contacted in advance, informed of Covid-19 safety protocols and interviews arranged at a location and time convenient to the participant (Teti, Schatz & Liebenberg, 2020). Interviews were recorded to be transcribed later and collected data organised and stored digitally on a password protected file on the researcher's computer. Relevant, standardised and non-leading questions were developed and prewritten as part of the interview guide and research instrument as seen in *Annexure D*; Questions were read to the participants, starting with broad questions followed by specific questions to ascertain detail (Mears, 2012). Additional probe questions were asked as necessary to clarify responses (Mears, 2012). After conducting four interviews, it became clear that participant narratives lacked context regarding their own history with and feelings about food waste. To gain a deeper understanding and ensure participant contexts were considered, four additional questions were added to the interview guide and asked in the remaining interviews.

Data Analysis Method

Qualitative data analysis involves rigorous analysis of non-numerical data including words, observations, or social artefacts and interpretation of data to generate detailed descriptions of findings (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). This study which utilised in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data required analysis of the observation notes and interview text to identify, describe and interpret meaning (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). A thematic analysis involves effectively identifying recurring themes in data including concepts, ideas and how participants experience a phenomenon, which are then organised into meaningful groups based on similarities; meaning is then subjectively interpreted from these themes through a systematic coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

A thematic analysis was chosen because it is suitable for exploratory qualitative studies and is useful for gaining an understanding of people's opinions, experiences and beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2014). As the aim of this study was to describe whether Woolworths is purposeful in relation to its food waste management practices, analysing participant views and perceptions of the brand and its practices aligned to the interpretivist paradigm and supported a thematic analysis (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

As qualitative research is iterative, the analysis and interpretation processes were repeated to yield new insights by identifying and refining interpretations of themes in the text (Silverman, 2020). Repetition of the analysis aided in identifying patterns and interpretations of text from general to specific and vice versa based on hermeneutics and improved understanding by building on descriptions in each iteration (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Thus, the thematic analysis conducted for this study was also an inductive approach in that the process started with specific observations and moved to broader generalisations to develop theories (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Iterative, inductive thematic analysis was chosen because it is effective for insightfully analysing interview transcripts which was the data collection method for this research (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

Analysis of Data and Findings

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis was conducted using an eight-step approach which serves to reduce the amount of raw data, organise data, identify patterns through interpretation and present findings through substantiation (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

Firstly, data was prepared by organising and transcribing raw data collected from interviews and reflective notes made during reading and coding (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). Secondly, the coding unit was defined with level one and level two codes to organise data into manageable parts (Rivas, 2012). Thirdly, a coding scheme was developed inductively from data to categorise coding units by common properties or themes and categories were exhaustive, mutually exclusive, specific and easily discernible (Rivas, 2012). Fourth, the coding scheme was tested for consistency and issues resolved (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). The fifth step involved inductively coding all text through thematic coding and scrutinising text to identify emerging codes, dominant trends and themes which were then compared (Rivas, 2012). Identified themes and categories were named and described in terms of what is relevant to the goal of the study (Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2014). The coding process was repeated three times until data saturation was reached. For the sixth step, completed coding was checked for consistency and themes refined (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). In the seventh step, the coded data was interpreted to understand the broader meanings and conclusions were drawn in terms of the identified themes (Braun *et al.*, 2014). Finally, the analysis process and findings were reported on in the eighth step and presented through detailed thick descriptions of the analysis and interpretations (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

Thematic Analysis Themes and Codes.

Theme	Level 1 Codes	Level 2 Codes
Motivations for brand choice	• Convenience • Variety • Quality • Price • Value for money • Prepackaged meals • Fresh Produce • Dairy	• Time saving & easy to prepare food. • Freshness. • Taste. • Poor quality.
Consumer Perceptions of Woolworths Food Waste Management	• Uncertainty • Shelf-life Perceptions • Consumer Perception of Food Waste • Refrigeration perceptions • Food Donations • Small Portion Size perception • Packaging improves shelf-life • Date Labelling Perceptions • Serving Size Accuracy	• Unsure of how Woolworths reduces consumer food waste. • Woolworths Food lasts longer. • Woolworths Food goes off quickly. • Trust that food will last long after expiry date. • Belief that food expires very shortly after expiry date. • Date Label is easily understood. • Consumer opts to purchase latest expiry date.
Consumer Food Waste Behaviors	• Consumer Food Waste behavior • Consumer Food Waste Management Methods • Promotions	• Overbuying. • Food left to expire • Consumer feels need to take advantage promotion to save money.
Meaningful brand perceptions	• Brand Distrust • Brand Trust • Sustainability	• Perceived retailer food waste. • Brand perceived as prioritising profit. • Perceived false sustainability claims. • Trust in brand because of quality product. • Improved brand perception because of food waste management. • Environmentally Sustainable. • Social contribution to sustainability. • Unsustainable Brand Practice.

Table 1 – Thematic Analysis Themes & Codes

Theme 1 - Motivations for brand choice

Woolworths' consumers that participated in this study conveyed a number of brand perceptions related to their experience with Woolworths food, which serve as motivations for choosing to shop at the retailer instead of competitors. The literature suggests that brand preference is greater for brands with purpose that add value to people's lives by consistently delivering on brand promises (Cook *et al.*, 2010), creating shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011), or enabling them to achieve their goals (Beverland, 2021). Consumer brand preferences may also be relevant to food waste levels.

Convenience was reported as a significant motivation for many participants to purchase from Woolworths and most occasionally purchase some form of pre-prepared meal or pre-prepared produce. One participant suggests time saving as a primary reason for shopping at Woolworths:

"We buy more the ready-made food, just to cut down on time in making food and that's more what we buy, so we don't really buy stuff that we still have to make. I think Woolworths, everybody wants stuff that's ready-made and easy to cook."

Most of these consumers also reported of low levels of Woolworths food wastage. This may be supported by findings in a previous study by Cronje *et al.*, (2018), on household food waste in Kimberley, which found convenience food such as pre-prepared meals were among the least wasted food items.

Quality was another motivation that all participants mentioned extensively and was the primary reason for brand preference in customer narratives. Food quality perceptions emerged as freshness, taste, aesthetic appearance and how long food lasts, which are similar to quality expectations identified by Oelofse *et al.* (2020), that can lead to food waste. Most participants perceived Woolworths's products to be of a good quality. One participant cites quality (in a positive tone) as their motivation for brand preference:

'I feel like Woolworths' quality is definitely better with certain produce and products. Um, and I also feel like their products last longer than other brands do.'

Some customers also emphasised that in their experience, Woolworths's food was especially fresh. Terms used by participants in this study like '*fresh*' and '*superior quality*' when referring to produce, align with findings by Oelofse *et al.*, (2020), that consumers may feel entitled to high quality produce that is visually appealing and free of any defects. Multiple participants also referred to situations where if they found a food product to not be of the expected quality, they would dispose of it, leading to food waste.

'There's nothing worse than buying something and then finding that (shaking head) it wasn't quality and you couldn't eat it anyway.'

This confirms perceptions highlighted in previous literature (Oelofse *et al.*, 2020). However, one participant suggests that Woolworths's quality reduces waste, stating "*The quality is good, so you want to finish it. It's not like you buy something and you don't like it and it goes to waste.*"

One female participant who had a recent bad experience with Woolworths felt that the brand's quality had dropped. However, despite expressing a highly negative attitude toward the brand throughout various narrations, she expressed in multiple instances that she previously supported and trusted the brand because of their quality:

'Previously I loved Woolworths, we only shopped at them, like I was very serious about we only buy fresh stuff from them because its good quality, it lasts, you can see its proper fruits vegetables, good taste, everything.'

Most participants further reported that they found that Woolworths products lasted longer than competitors. This finding may indicate that the risk of food waste due to expiry is reduced, which was identified as a significant cause of food waste in a case study of five areas in Tshwane (Ramukhwatho, 2016; Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016).

The consistent mention of quality throughout participant narratives could support Woolworths being described as a meaningful brand in terms of creating value for consumers but also in the existence and fulfillment of a specific brand purpose, according to the literature (Cook *et al.*, 2010; Beverland, 2021). Woolworths Holdings Limited (2021a), states their purpose is "Adding quality to life" which is

reflected in their marketing and tagline of “Woolworths, the difference” which refers to a difference in quality. Beverland (2021) also suggests that meaningful brands are co-created between brands and consumers and use of the term “quality” in Woolworths’ branding and communication may be evidence of this, having influenced consumer narratives due to existing associations with the brand.

Many participants also referred to the price of Woolworths products suggesting they are expensive when compared to other brands. However, multiple participants expressed that they felt the higher price was justified because of the higher level of quality, suggesting good value for money was another key consideration for Woolworths’s consumers. Some participant’s experiences, both from low- and high-income families, indicated that the higher price of Woolworths food served as a deterrent for food waste because they felt they had to finish what they had bought.

‘Um, very rarely, because Woolworths is quite expensive (laughs and motions hands), so when you buy from Woolworths, you finish it.’

Theme 2 - Consumer Perceptions of Woolworths Food Waste Management

In the context of this study, consumer perceptions of Woolworths food waste management refer to how consumers interpret and understand the ways and extent to which Woolworths manages food waste.

Most participants could identify at least one Woolworths food waste management practice. However, many participants expressed verbally and some through body language, such as long pauses to think and confused facial expressions, that they were uncertain of how Woolworths helps them to reduce their household food waste:

'Um... (pause thinking), as for personal food waste... (pause thinking), I don't actually know.'

Another participant demonstrated uncertainty but still showed trust that the brand does manage food waste in some way by saying they do have 'initiatives', they are just unsure of what they are called.

Woolworths' food donations were the most common initiative that emerged within the theme. Most participants reported that they know Woolworths reduces food waste by donating excess food that is close to expiry. Previous studies that utilise the food waste management hierarchy, identify donations as the second most favourable food waste management operation of re-use, in which surplus food is distributed to people in need (Teller *et al.*, 2018; Teigiserova *et al.*, 2019).

A third of participants also had personal experiences with food donations through charities that they have been involved with and who benefitted from this Woolworths practice:

'Um (pause thinking), my aunt has an orphanage and I know that Woolworths used to give them food that was close to sell by. Um, and that was quite a good way to... (small pause) sort of, get rid of the waste and um... you know feed people who need the food. So, um ja I think that's a great uh, policy that Woolworths had.'

The second most prominent perception that emerged from participant narratives was that Woolworths food lasts longer or has a significantly longer shelf-life than competitor brands. Some participants referred to Woolworths having 'good refrigeration to preserve their food'. Multiple participants also suggested that they felt Woolworths's packaging was effective and helped reduce food waste by making food last longer. These perceptions may be supported by previous literature that indicates packaging should be a key food waste management method for retailers (WWF, 2017).

The perceived shelf-life of products as part of Woolworths food waste management was also closely related to consumer interpretations of dated labels. All participants felt that date labels were helpful in reducing food waste but despite most indicating that they thought the labels were accurate, consumers still interpreted use-by dates quite differently. Female participants suggested that from experience, Woolworths's food lasts well after the use by date in ranges from a week to over two weeks. However, many male participants, indicated that they would only eat Woolworths's food within a short period of one to two days after the use by date had passed:

'Generally, I eat it if its within 1 or 2 days. Um, but if its past that I would probably refrain.'

The difference in male and female participant interpretations may be attributed to female participants being the primary shoppers in their households and being responsible for preparing meals more regularly (Ramukhwatho, 2016; Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016). Thus, they have more experience with how long products last after the use by date (Phillips & Shah, 2017).

Some male participants who said they would not consume products more than a few days after the use by date, also expressed some degree of trust that retailers would add a 'buffer period' as one participant described it, to the use-by date. One participant suggests this 'buffer period' is at least a week or two but still maintained that he would only consume the product very close to the use by date on the label:

'I think a lot of the time they put the best before date... uh... at least like a week or two before it actually (emphasis) goes off or expires. But I guess it depends on what, you know, what product it is.'

Differing perceptions of how long food remains fit for consumption by the participants may indicate confusion surrounding the labels. As was the case in an American study by Phillips and Shah (2017), which found that some consumers did not understand the meaning behind dates on retailer labels. Similarly, the different participant interpretations identified in this study could potentially lead to food waste, with consumers disposing of products before the food has actually expired and supports literature which submits that "sell by dates" and date label confusion are known causes of consumer food waste (Oelofse & Marx-Pienaar, 2016; Phillips & Shah, 2017).

However, it was notable that all participants reported that they did not find anything confusing about Woolworths dated labels, which differs from findings by Phillips and Shah, (2017). Participants answered confidently, using terms like 'simple', 'clear' and 'straightforward', suggesting they firmly believe they accurately interpret the labels, despite their narratives indicating differing perceptions of edibility once the date has passed.

One female participant stated, 'No, no, I'm a shopper, I know them.', suggesting that regular shoppers and cooks may learn the extent to which food lasts past the use by date more intuitively and also supports their experience and perception that Woolworths's food lasts longer.

Another perception which emerged relating to Woolworths's date labels was that multiple participants expressed that they purposefully select food with the latest expiry date to ensure the food will last longer. One participant describes his experience of finding food left on the shelves at Woolworths which 'expires' the same day and feeling conflicted about the purchase:

'No, I think it's pretty clear, the labels are pretty clear. Um... but like I say, you can often go Woolworths and they have on that day, it expires that day, so then you got to decide whether you should buy it because if you don't eat it today (shakes head), then its expired.'

This resembles consumer interpretations documented by Phillips and Shah, (2017), which found some consumers felt that food literally expired on the use-by date and could not be consumed once it had passed.

Another participant also states:

'Now, people start searching for the one that says sell by the latest so it can just last 2-3 days longer from when I bought it.'

The participant later suggests that this causes food waste because the food goes rotten before they can eat it or they are 'overeating' to avoid waste. The sentiment indicates that the participant may have experienced scenarios where they overprepared food to avoid expiry which led to waste. Similarly, a previous study by (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016) found, overpreparation is a significant cause of food waste in higher income households which may be relevant to this study as all participants fall into LSM bands 7-10.

Another prominent perception was that most participants described Woolworths's portion sizes as small. Many participants indicated that they thought the small portions were helpful in reducing food waste and were part of the reason they did not waste food when purchasing from the brand. As overbuying is one of the highest self-reported reasons for food waste in the literature, smaller portions may help reduce the chance of excess purchase (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016; Oelofse *et al.*, 2020).

While some participants reported that Woolworths portion sizes are accurate, most indicated that the serving sizes were smaller than the recommendation on the packaging, suggesting inaccuracy. Many participants used examples to illustrate that serving sizes are roughly half of what is indicated on the packaging, explaining that a recommended serving size of four would actually only serve two people or a serving size of two would only serve one.

One participant who is a regular shopper suggests they have learnt to buy with this inaccuracy in mind:

'Maybe too little, but I know the sizes, so if they say four people then I know its for two, so if I've got four people then I will buy "their eight" (motions inverted commas with fingers), but it will be for four people. We eat a lot (laughs).'

This inaccuracy could potentially lead to overbuying behaviour (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016; Roodhuyzen, *et al.*, 2017), as some participants suggested they may have purchased too much due to the perceived portion size inaccuracy.

Despite the differences between Woolworths recommended serving sizes and consumer perceptions of how much the meal actually serves, most participants did not feel like they wasted food as a result. This was mainly attributed to the portions being smaller rather than larger.

Theme 3 – Consumer food waste behaviours

In the context of this study, consumer food waste behaviours relate to consumer perceptions or reported behaviours which resulted in or prevented food waste.

The primary food waste behaviour revealed in participant narratives was due to overbuying. This aligns with findings by Ramukhwatho *et al.*, (2016), which indicated buying too much was the second highest reported cause of food waste in a study of areas in Tshwane Metro.

In this study, some participants suggested that excessive purchase led to wasting Woolworths's food but one participant clarified that it happened 'very seldomly' and another explained that they felt they wasted less when buying from Woolworths but still wasted. Contrary to other participants, one participant who had a negative attitude toward the brand, expressed that they felt like they waste Woolworths's food 'all the time' because of a perceived drop in quality, such as freezer burn on fruits, fresh produce not lasting and pre-prepared meals lacking nutritional balance. Other participants also suggested poor quality or taste would lead them to dispose of food but that this had not occurred in their experience with Woolworths.

Another food waste behaviour linked to overbuying was letting food expire as a result of forgetting the item in storage. One participant described food waste behaviours in his family as having influenced his negative feelings toward food waste:

'I would say my parents never really cared too much about um... food waste. (small pause) Um... and that kind of made me feel like it's important because they just kind of throw away anything, they overbuy all the time. Um, they don't check the expiry dates etc. etc. and they waste a lot of food like that.'

These findings suggest that consumers may not plan their meals effectively and are then more likely to over purchase or let food expire as identified in a previous study by Cronje *et al.*, (2018), on household food waste in Kimberly. Another male participant expressed that if food was not consumed within 'a day or two' of the use by date that he felt it would need to be thrown away. As discussed in theme

2, the differing interpretations of expiry dates could lead to food waste behaviours (Phillips & Shah, 2017). Similarly, findings by Ramukhwatho *et al.*, (2016), regarding poor storage of food leading to waste, suggest consumers may not pay attention to storage and date labels or may misunderstand the retention period.

Promotions emerged as another element of food waste behaviour among a number of participants. Only a few participants mentioned that promotions were a reason for brand preference but many participants indicated that they felt a need to take advantage of a promotion even if there was a risk of over-purchase and subsequent food waste. This sentiment is like findings in studies by Le Borgne *et al.*, (2018) and Oelofse and Marx-Pienaar (2016) that suggest bulk promotions can encourage overbuying of food items. One participant describes her experience, when asked if she ever felt like she purchased too much because of a promotion, expressing a sense of guilt through her tone and body language:

'(slight pullback and guilty expression) Very often... (small laugh) especially... especially with the vegetables (smiling slightly)... you know, you buy the veggies and then you think you going to use it that week but then something comes up and you don't use it and then by the next week you can't really use it anymore. Yes (nodding).'

Half of the participants suggested they do overbuy due to promotions and that this may lead to food waste in their experience. One participant put forward an example in which Woolworths's promotions require you to purchase 'one of each' type of a selection of vegetables but as a consumer she admits that she doesn't like or want one of the items but feels that the price drop makes the purchase worthwhile regardless. These types of promotions could lead to additional consumer food waste and is similar to findings in a previous paper by Le Borgne *et al.*, (2018), which highlighted that retail promotions encourage excess purchase. South African studies by Oelofse and Marx-Pienaar (2016) and Ramukhwatho *et al.*, (2014) also suggest that consumers being enticed by promotions generate food waste.

In terms of disposal, most participants suggested that they usually do not dispose of Woolworths food because it is consumed. All participants did however indicate that if they did dispose of Woolworths food it would just be thrown in the garbage bin which would ultimately go to landfill. This is in line with findings by the WWF (2017), which noted that 90% of food waste in South Africa goes to landfill and has negative environmental impacts. However, the majority of participants suggested they would first attempt to donate the food to someone or feed it to a pet. Multiple participants also suggested that they don't recycle or make use of composting because of impracticality.

Theme 4 – Meaningful brand perceptions

In the context of this study, Woolworths as a meaningful brand relates to how consumers perceive the brand as purposeful beyond only a desire for profit (Cook *et al.*, 2010; Havas, 2021).

Contributing to food waste management, sustainability and prioritising the brand purpose emerged from participant narratives as reasons to like or trust Woolworths and improved their perception of the brand as meaningful. These aspects align with previous literature that outlines meaningful brand criteria (Besley & Ghatak, 2017; Havas, 2021; Beverland, 2021) and how brand associations are formed from consumer experiences.

Participant descriptions of Woolworths exhibited a degree of trust in the brand for various reasons. Quality was identified as a key reason for some consumers with one participant suggesting they have not been let down in terms of product freshness, shelf-life or overall quality:

'I find mostly their food is fresh...(small pause) um and it lasts longer and its really good quality. You never let down (nodding to reaffirm point).'

Other participants reported the brand is credible because of its quality control, suggesting that consistent quality in terms of fresh food that lasts longer made them feel like the brand cared more about its customers. As discussed in Theme 1, these perceptions could support Woolworths being described as a meaningful brand through adding value to people's lives, as well as fulfilling the brand promise to improve customer loyalty (Cook *et al.*, 2010; Beverland, 2021).

As illustrated in Theme 2, Food donation was the primary Woolworths food waste management practice that the majority of participants could identify and also emerged as a key practice linked to positive consumer perceptions of the brand among participants. Multiple participants praised the brand for their food donation policy and some participants suggested they felt the brand does a lot to reduce food waste in reference to the donations.

One participant described her personal experience with food waste as 'heartbreaking' and in a later narrative expresses why she would characterise Woolworths as caring about people and the environment beyond just making a profit:

'I did pro-bono work at children's homes and to see so many people without food. Um, to think, that to just throw away food is... ja... breaks my heart.'

'I definitely think so, because I mean, they... they give away (laughs) hundreds of thousands of Rands of food. I mean, they literally... I know of children's homes and old age homes who run almost solely off free Woolworths's donations. So, I think they, they do care and they do care about the local community and using local products as much as possible, like supporting local resources.'

The participant's narrative suggests an emotional connection has been established with the brand through their experience of having worked with the recipients of donations. Furthermore, the participant expresses that she feels the brand does care and the tone and body language used suggests this refers to the brand caring about not only the local community through donations but also herself as a consumer and as a person. This is supported by previous literature which indicates the importance of emotional benefits for consumers in the value propositions of meaningful brands (Havas, 2021; Aaker, 2012).

The majority of participants also felt that Woolworths management of food waste made them more responsible as a brand. One participant suggested that the benefit of food waste reduction for environmental sustainability was the primary reason they felt the brand was more responsible in the context of food waste. Multiple participants who mentioned Woolworths's packaging, shelf-life and date labelling also indicated that they felt the brand was more responsible based on these practices. Similarly, previous literature on meaningful brands identifies sustainability and contributing to community upliftment for shared value creation as practices which improve customer opinions and are characteristic of brands with purpose (Beverland, 2021; Besley & Ghatak, 2017; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Another aspect emerged in consumer narratives related to meaningful brand perceptions in that many of the participants felt Woolworths claims about

sustainability were trustworthy. However, multiple participants put forward that they thought the claims had to be true for the brand to avoid legal or public backlash, suggesting they do not necessarily trust the brand implicitly but more the system of regulation it falls under.

Some participants also displayed significant distrust in the brand in terms of their sustainability. One participant using free-range chicken as an example, reported that he felt the brand may be misleading in their claims:

'Um, I think for the most part, its false. Um, for example, free-range chickens. I don't think they are free-range by definition, they only have to have a small little piece of the enclosure open for sunlight, so with that example I don't think its true. I think its misleading.'

Multiple participants also expressed some level of doubt in the tone of their responses and some suggested they believe retailers and corporations to be responsible for food waste but did not reference Woolworths specifically. A small number of participants also surmised that Woolworths prioritised profit over purpose in the context of food waste, which previous literature by (Cook *et al.*, 2010; Beverland, 2021) identifies as uncharacteristic of a meaningful brand. One participant illustrates the idea that sales are more important to the brand than consumer food waste:

'No, not at all (shaking head). I don't think Woolworths is worried about how much food you waste, as long as they sell (small smile).'

This participant later suggested that Woolworths may reduce food waste in some ways, but their plastic packaging leads to a higher environmental impact which cancels out their efforts from his perspective. Another participant states:

'No, I think their responsibility to shareholders um... overpowers their uh... (small pause thinking), ability to um look after the environment and their sort of care for people.'

These perceptions may reduce the extent to which Woolworths can be described as meaningful by consumers as previous literature suggests some consumers will actively avoid brands that appear unsustainable (Besley & Ghatak, 2017).

While some participants expressed distrust in the brand, most felt that Woolworths could be described as meaningful. Furthermore, most participants expressed positive attitudes toward the brand in the context of food waste. One participant reported that she never considered food waste as something Woolworths could be involved in, suggesting a degree of trust in the brand:

'You know I like the brand; I've never thought about their food waste. It never crosses my mind that it goes to waste.'

Another participant highlights that they believe the brand does not waste food, supported by perceptions that the brand actively improves communities and supports charities:

'Well, I like the brand because I don't feel like they do waste food. Um, ja, I think I... as... I like Woolworths as a brand and like I said, they do, do a lot for the community and charities and stuff. So ja, I definitely think, I don't think that they are bad with food waste. I think they are actually pretty good compared to other brands.'

Based on the narratives of most participants and their attitudes toward the brand, their perception of Woolworths seemed to be significantly improved by their experience and knowledge of food waste management practices. These findings are supported by previous literature that submits that brands which demonstrate care for people and efforts to improve sustainability also exhibit greater customer preference and loyalty (Havas, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Conclusions

To draw conclusions, the research questions were addressed independently. The primary objective was then addressed to determine the extent to which Woolworths could be described as a meaningful brand within the context of food waste management.

1. What are the food waste management practices directed toward consumers in Woolworths?

The consumer facing food waste management strategies that participants in this study could identify were: food donations, responsible sourcing, packaging, dated labels, refrigerated storage and controlled serving sizes. These strategies corresponded with most of Woolworths' practices that were outlined in the literature review, suggesting participants have some knowledge of the brand's strategies. Furthermore, the donation of food that was left on shelves and nearing its sell-by date, was the main practice that participants were aware of. However, it was evident that many consumers were uncertain of how Woolworths reduces their personal or household food waste. These findings suggest that consumers are not fully aware of the brand's food waste management practices.

2. How do Woolworths' consumers interpret meaning in retail level food waste management practices?

Participants were found to have differing perceptions of how long food remains edible after the use-by date on Woolworths dated labels had passed. The differences were especially notable between male and female participants and presents an opportunity for further research into why these groups differ. It was also discovered that food waste occurs as a result when food is disposed of before it had actually expired indicating that Woolworths dated labels are not understood as intended by consumers. These findings correspond with results in previous studies on dated labels, that found that differing consumer interpretations of dated

labels leads to food waste (Oelofse & Marx-Pienaar, 2016; Oelofse *et al.*, 2020; Phillips & Shah, 2017). Furthermore, it was found that all participants perceived Woolworths labels as simple and clear but still interpreted them differently, suggesting consumers are unaware that they may be misinterpreting the dates and actual product expiry. Consumer education in this regard or improved date label designs should be considered to avoid misinterpretation.

Furthermore, participants generally perceived Woolworths's portion sizes to be half the size of the Woolworths serving recommendations and the inaccuracy leads to overbuying behaviour which was identified as a significant contributor to food waste in prior research (Ramukhwatho *et al.*, 2016; Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Roodhuyzen, *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, it was found that some Woolworths promotions lead consumers to purchase too much or purchase some products that they did not want in order to take advantage of the promotion and supports findings in previous studies (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018; Oelofse & Marx-Pienaar, 2016; Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018). It was concerning to find that many participants felt it was still worth it to take advantage of a sale even if it risked food waste. These findings along with date label findings led to the conclusion that consumer interpretations of Woolworths food waste management practices are likely to lead to consumer food waste in some instances.

3. What does Woolworths do to be seen as a brand with purpose in terms of food waste management?

It was discovered that participants largely trust the brand, mainly because of perceived superior quality products and practices like the donation of food. The majority of participants reported that in their experiences, Woolworths's food lasted longer, was fresher and tasted better. This higher level of perceived quality was found to reduce waste as consumers had less instances where food expired before they could consume it or where they did not like the product quality and chose not to consume it. According to Oelofse *et al.* (2020), the excessive quality expectations of consumers may lead to food waste, however this study found that consumers very rarely have issues with Woolworths' product quality. Additionally, although participants in this study all dispose of food products in bins that would

go to landfill, they rarely disposed of Woolworths food, suggesting there is a low environmental impact.

It was also concluded that Woolworths' brand purpose of "Adding quality to life" was supported by participant quality perceptions and brand practices, suggesting that the brand purpose is fulfilled in this regard (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2021a). This finding positions the brand as more meaningful according to meaningful brand literature (Cook *et al.*, 2010; Beverland, 2021).

4. What are Woolworths' consumer attitudes towards the brand based on their food waste management strategies?

Woolworths' food waste management practices like food donations made participants perceive the brand as more meaningful and established emotional connections to the brand through the belief that Woolworths cares about people and communities. This is also supported by food donations falling under the second most preferable operation of re-use in the waste hierarchy, meaning the practice reduces the negative effects of waste on the environment, economy and human wellbeing (Pires & Martinho, 2019). Woolworths' packaging, shelf-life and date labelling were also believed to make the brand more responsible in the context of food waste management. However, it was also found that some participants expressed distrust in the brand in terms of their sustainability claims and felt the brand cared more about profit than about people or food waste. Despite some consumers suggesting the brand was not meaningful due to prioritising profit over purpose, it was concluded that the majority felt positively about the brand in the context of food waste.

Research Objective Conclusions

The primary research objective was to gain a thorough understanding of the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a “meaningful” brand in context of food waste management.

Within the context of this study, it was clear that Woolworths’ food waste management practices do reduce food waste and align with preferable operations of the waste hierarchy framework based on examples from participant narratives (Pires & Martinho, 2019). Additionally, key practices like food donations are widely recognised by consumers and the brand’s management of food waste improves consumer perceptions of the brand as meaningful and trustworthy. While some Woolworths practices such as date labels, serving recommendations and promotions were found to have the potential to lead to consumer food waste, the sample in this study suggested that these practises have a low impact on their food waste behaviour. Furthermore, consumer narratives strongly supported Woolworths as having a high-quality standard of food that lasts longer due to packaging, storage, quality control and labelling which all reduces the likelihood of waste. The perceived quality and value creation in other aspects such as community upliftment also suggests that the brand’s purpose is achieved to some extent. Based on these findings, this study concludes that Woolworths can be described as a meaningful brand in the context of its food waste management and is supported by consumer’s positive perceptions of the brand in this area, as well as reportedly low levels of food waste.

Recommendations

In the context of this study, it was found that Woolworths could be described as a meaningful brand based on consumer perceptions that illustrate effective management of food waste, however these results cannot be generalised due to the small sample size and limited food waste management context. Other food waste management practices in the supply chain were not considered in this study and some consumers expressed distrust for the brand in regards to prioritising profit over sustainability. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot confirm that Woolworths is a meaningful brand and further research into non-consumer facing food waste management practices and sustainability initiatives along the supply chain should be conducted to gain a better understanding of Woolworths strategies that may contribute to the brand purpose.

Additionally, the sample was not representative of all Woolworths consumers and results could differ between geographic locations and income groups as was found in prior studies by Ramukhwatho (2016) and (Oelofse *et al.*, 2018). The cultural diversity of the sample was also limited and a larger, more diverse sample could provide insight into differences in how strategies like promotions are perceived, the types of food wasted and reasons for waste (Oelofse *et al.*, 2020). Thus, a broader study of consumer perceptions across Woolworths branches in different cities and areas is recommended to gain a better understanding of the extent to which the brand reduces food waste as a whole.

Furthermore, in this study, despite all participants strongly believing that Woolworths labels are easy to understand, it was found that male and female participants had differing interpretations that could lead to food waste. The reasons for this are unclear and should be investigated before conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of dated labels in food waste reduction. Additionally, it was concluded that certain Woolworths practices like promotions, date labels and serving sizes could lead to food waste based on customer perceptions. Thus, Woolworths should re-examine these practices to ensure they are clearly understood and further research is necessary to determine if the positive impact

of these strategies is greater than the negative and how consumer interpretations can be improved to avoid waste.

Findings also indicated that many consumers have limited awareness of how Woolworths reduces their household food waste. Thus, the brand should consider educating consumers on these processes as they improve perception of the brand as meaningful.

Additionally, this study was conducted during a period of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions which may have altered consumer behaviour or Woolworths' food waste management practices. For example, consumers spending more time at home may increase how often they cook or shop and interact with date labels or other practices. However, as this study focused only on consumer facing practices and perceptions no conclusions could be drawn. As there is still very limited research on food waste management during the pandemic, additional research should be conducted into possible changes in consumer behaviour that could provide insight into their perceptions of food waste management practices.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring Ethical Research

Ethics in research refers to the morale code of conduct and professional standards that a researcher must uphold in order to conduct research responsibly (Louw, 2014). It is important that researchers maintain a level of integrity by being respectful to stakeholders including participants, peers, broader society and the academic institution they represent in order to be considered trustworthy (Louw, 2014).

As part of the ethical considerations of this research, ethical clearance (Annexure A), was attained from Vega School of Branding and the Independent Institute of Education (IIE) to proceed with the research and data collection based on a review of the research proposal.

All participants in the study were formally invited and notified that they would be participating in a research study, should they accept. Informed written consent was also required to ensure they fully understood the process (Louw, 2014). A written statement identifying the researcher, institution and explanation of the research purpose; what participants would be required to do in the data collection process; how responses would be recorded and how long participation was required for was provided to participants over the age of 18 as seen in Annexure B (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; Walker, 2007). Participant consent forms were supplied to participants, their consent signed and kept on record (Annexure B).

For data collection, it was important that participants felt comfortable, safe and respected both physically and psychologically (Louw, 2014). Participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential and not revealed to anyone, only the researcher would have access to their names and corresponding responses from in-depth interviews (Rolland, Dewaele & Costa, 2019). The research refers to participants by number, excluding sensitive or identifying information (Rolland *et al.*, 2019). Participants were reassured that participation is entirely voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty (Louw, 2014). Participants were also notified that Covid-19

precautions would be taken for all in person interviews, such as physical distancing, masks and mandatory hand sanitisation (Roberts *et al.*, 2021). To ensure a comfortable setting, research was conducted in a venue of the participant's choosing.

To display respect and consideration for participants and avoid harm, the purpose of the research and specific goals were made completely transparent (Louw, 2014). Any information considered sensitive would not be revealed to maintain ethical confidentiality (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, Jessop, 2012). Vulnerable participants such as minors, or those who are illiterate were not invited to participate (Miller *et al.*, 2012). Incentives were not mentioned to participants in order to avoid influencing responses (Louw, 2014). To avoid any potential emotional harm to participants from group settings, interviews were conducted one on one (Walker, 2007). Additionally, participants were debriefed and given an opportunity to comment on how they felt about the data collection process (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

Ethical considerations were also undertaken for the researcher who committed to a personal ethical code regarding data collection, analysis and reporting (Louw, 2014). No information was falsified in any way and data collection was entirely transparent and accurately recorded (Louw, 2014). Results were not distorted in any form and aspects of the research are emphasised equally (Louw, 2014). Although qualitative research is inherently subjective, there was no intentional bias on behalf of the researcher toward a desired result (Louw, 2014). In-depth interviews were conducted ethically and participants were not influenced to provide specific responses in any way (Rolland *et al.*, 2019).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of a study refer to issues or weaknesses that may arise during a study that the researcher has little or no control of and which may undermine the trustworthiness of results (Enslin, 2014). As this study is exploratory and qualitative, several limitations apply, including time consuming subjective interpretation of data, results cannot be generalised and the need for further research in future to compare findings and validate trustworthiness (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Anderson, 2010). The scope of the study is also limited to exploring how Woolworths' customers perceive Woolworths' food waste management practices and whether these practices contribute to Woolworths being seen as a brand with purpose. As consumer behaviour is not observed, inconsistencies between participant responses regarding perceived food waste and actual consumer behaviour are possible (Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018).

Furthermore, the subjective qualitative approach and direct researcher involvement through in-depth interviews means a greater chance that the researcher's own view-point, beliefs, biases and intellectual tradition may influence data collection, analysis and interpretation (Anderson, 2010). The quality of research is also dependent on researcher skill level which can compromise dependability if research is not conducted with rigor and transparency (Anderson, 2010). Additionally, non-probability, purposive sampling is used to select participants based on researcher judgement and analysis of people's perceptions requires interpretation by the researcher, both of which will make demonstrating and upholding rigor challenging because the potential for subjectivity is high (Suri, 2011; Anderson, 2010).

Shifting societal conditions are also a potential limitation that can influence results of a study according to Enslin (2014). The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic can be considered an extreme shift in conditions which has altered consumer food waste behaviours, the lived experiences of people and the food waste management practices of Woolworths (Roe *et al.*, 2020; Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2020). Given the current Covid-19 restrictions, qualitative data collection methods will be more difficult than before and non-verbal cues will be difficult to observe if

participants are wearing masks or through phone or video recordings, threatening credibility (Seitz, 2015; Roberts *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, once Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, consumer food waste perceptions and the food waste management practices of brands may dramatically shift again, compromising relevance of findings (Roe *et al.*, 2020).

As Woolworths is a large-scale brand with hundreds of stores across South Africa (Woolworths Holdings Limited, 2020), accessing a sufficiently representative sample of consumers is a logistical and budget limitation (Enslin, 2014). Lingering Covid-19 concerns may also make consumers unwilling to participate in interviews and harder to access (Roberts *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, cultural context is prevalent in food waste perceptions, especially regarding what types or parts of food are considered edible and what constitutes waste from their perspective (Horoś & Ruppenthal, 2021). However, the researcher's ability to access culturally diverse consumers is limited by geographic and language barriers (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). For practicality, the study is limited to eight participants from a few areas in Johannesburg and purposively selected. However, the small sample size and being unable to access customers from Woolworths branches in more areas could mean data saturation is not achieved, in addition to limiting how the study creates meaning and transferability in a broader South African food waste context (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018; Anderson, 2010).

Another limitation of the phenomenological qualitative research design and in-depth interviews for data collection is that the methods are expensive and time-consuming and generate significant amounts of data which need to be analysed (Anderson, 2010). As the time-frame for the research is short with no allocated budget, it may be difficult for a single researcher to accurately collect enough data and conduct a thematic analysis and interpretation of the data within the resource and time constraints (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). In qualitative research, results also cannot be objectively verified or generalised and may have less credibility in the scientific community and subsequently with brands who may benefit from the findings (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the research design, methods and analysis can be considered trustworthy, the four dimensions of trustworthiness in qualitative research were considered, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is determined by how accurately the primary data collected for the study from participants was analysed and interpreted by the researcher (Koonin, 2014). For this study, credibility will be increased through prolonged time spent with participants and familiarisation with data. The non-probability, purposive sampling will ensure many of the participants are known to the researcher, enabling prolonged contact and a better subjective understanding (Koonin, 2014). Additionally, in-depth interviews support longer discussions and greater credibility through exploration of their individual lived experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Data collection methods, analysis methods and participant engagement will also be transparently recorded and described in audit trails to support credibility (Cope, 2014). Furthermore, participants may be asked to review and cross-reference descriptions of their experience as part of the iterative thematic analysis to ensure it is accurate and believable from their point of view, improving credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the research findings may provide similar results if applied to similar groups, contexts or settings (Koonin, 2014). To achieve greater transferability the interpretivist, qualitative approach and thematic analysis is suited to generating rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences, context and perceptions, as well as identifying themes (Koonin, 2014); these could aid brands and other researchers not involved in this research in understanding participant lived experiences regarding food waste, making results relatable (Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Beyond this study, findings could aid brands in understanding how consumers interpret consumer facing food waste management practices and identify why certain practices such as date labels or promotions may be misunderstood by consumers and lead to food waste. Furthermore, the phenomenological research design which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions of Woolworths practices will generate some insight into whether consumers see Woolworths as a brand with purpose based on their food waste management and why, thus making findings transferable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to how well the research design and methodology is integrated from data collection through to analysis and findings which lead to theory generation (Koonin, 2014). Transparency in the research process determines dependability and will be achieved by meticulously and accurately describing all steps taken in the research process from the beginning of the study through to the generation and presentation of findings to create an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Furthermore, the method and process of thematic analysis is transparently described and conducted including research notes and process, while findings are interpreted and presented in a complete and truthful format that is recognisable to ensure dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Cope, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is determined by how effectively the researcher demonstrates that findings and subsequent interpretation were supported by and drawn from the data collected (Koonin, 2014). To ensure confirmability, the research process and how conclusions were reached are fully and accurately described with transparency to allow others to review, understand and develop conclusions that are similar (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The audit trail discussed under dependability will assist in confirmability of this study by demonstrating that data from in-depth interviews was representative of participant responses and not the researcher's biases (Cope, 2014). Additionally, transparency in thick descriptions and thematic analysis documentation including rich quotes from participants for each identified theme will show that findings were drawn directly from the data and interpretations developed through trustworthy, proven processes (Cope, 2014).

Anticipated Contributions

Firstly, this exploratory study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of whether Woolworths can be described as a brand with purpose, based on how consumers perceive and interpret Woolworths's food waste management practices. This will be achieved by conducting a transparent, unbiased and trustworthy study with rigor using a qualitative process that is documented in a high level of detail to ensure findings can be considered credible, dependable and confirmable to form a basis for future research into the emerging field (Anderson, 2010). Although results cannot be generalised to larger populations, qualitative research examines complex social issues in depth, generates compelling data, and findings can be transferable to other situations which could assist researchers in future studies to gain direction in the field of food waste management research (Anderson, 2010). Thus, the study could provide valid preliminary insights into whether consumers view brands as purposeful in the context of food waste and why, how consumers perceive and interpret retail food waste management practices and how misperception of food waste management practices can be avoided to reduce food waste.

Furthermore, this research could contribute to the very limited body of knowledge regarding consumer food waste, customer experiences and retail food waste management during the Covid-19 pandemic (Pappalardo *et al.*, 2020). Although harsh lockdown restrictions have mostly been lifted, it is argued that consumer fears and stockpiling behaviour may persist post-pandemic (Roe *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this study could aid brands in understanding how consumer perceptions have changed and may change in future disaster situations to inform future research and prepare food waste management strategies (Roe *et al.*, 2020).

For retailers, this research could assist in understanding how consumers interpret strategies like dated labels, promotions, packaging and other initiatives to help brands avoid negative interpretations that may lead to increased consumer food waste (Le Borgne *et al.*, 2018). Subsequently, this research could aid brands in optimising food waste management efforts at the retail and consumer levels and avoid practices which may unintentionally harm their reputation. Finally, this study

may also contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding customer perceptions of brands as having purpose beyond profit and how consumer facing food waste management strategies can improve brand image (Beverland, 2021; Kliaugaitė & Kruopienė, 2018).

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Annexures

(Please find annexures attached below)

Annexure A – Ethical Clearance Letter



Date: 27 July 2021

Student name: Kyle Sartor



Campus: Vega Bordeaux

Re: Approval of RMET8429 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!



GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: Dr Tish Taylor



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Dr Tish Taylor



Annexure B – Participant Consent Form

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Kyle Sartor and I am a student at Vega School. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Tish Taylor about consumer perceptions of Woolworth's food waste management practices and the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a brand with purpose in this context. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of how people interpret retail food waste management practices and if they contribute to Woolworths being described as a brand with purpose beyond profit. This research could assist brands in optimising food waste management strategies at the retail and consumer levels toward reducing food waste. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you have experience shopping at Woolworths. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a ten-minute interview with you in which I will ask you questions about Woolworths's food waste management. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your (insert what you are examining). If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Woolworths, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Postgraduate Diploma in Brand Building. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Kyle Sartor

██████████

██████████████████

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr Tish Taylor

██████████

██████████████████

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Kyle Sartor about consumer perceptions of Woolworth's food waste management practices and the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a brand with purpose in this context.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date

Annexure C – Audio/Video Recording Consent Form

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Kyle Sartor to audio record my interviews as part of the research about consumer perceptions of Woolworth's food waste management practices and the extent to which Woolworths can be described as a brand with purpose beyond profit in this context. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

Annexure D – Interview Guide Questions

No.	Interview Questions	Probing / sub-questions
1	What kind of food products do you purchase at Woolworths?	Do you purchase any ready or pre-prepared meals?
2	Why do you choose to buy food from Woolworths instead of other brands?	What do you like about Woolworths or what makes them special?
3	How do you feel about food waste?	
4	What personal experiences have influenced your feelings toward food waste?	
5	Do you ever feel like you waste food when you buy from Woolworths?	Why do you feel that way?
6	How do you dispose of Woolworths food products?	
7	What do you do with food if the Woolworths "best before" or "sell by" date has passed?	Do you think the quality of the food drops when the best before date has passed?
8	Do you ever buy too much food because of promotions like "buy 3, save R20"?	Do you feel like you should still take advantage of the sale even if it means buying too much?
9	Do you know of any ways in which Woolworths reduces food waste as a brand or helps you reduce your household food waste?	Do you think these make the brand more responsible?
10	Do you think Woolworths serving sizes are accurate and helpful in reducing food waste?	Do you ever buy too much or too little based on recommend serving sizes?
11	Do you think Woolworths dated labels on packaging are accurate and helpful in reducing food waste?	Is there anything confusing or that you don't understand about these?
12	To what extent do you think Woolworths claims about them being a sustainable brand are true?	For example, stickers that claim ingredients are responsibly sourced or that
13	Based on their management of food waste, would you describe Woolworths as a brand with purpose that cares about people and the environment more than just profit?	
14	How does Woolworths' management of food waste or lack thereof make you feel about the brand?	Is there anything you think Woolworths should do better?